



Poisoned Air

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Two separate but not unrelated exhibits will be examined here today in our intermittent study of our mad, mad world.

One is the latest edition of that rightist tip-sheet known as "Counterattack," a self-proclaimed voice of vigilant patriotism. This edition can only be described as a poorly veiled anti-Semitic tract, a characterization never lightly suggested in this space.

The other is the transcript of Sunday's "Meet the Press" show in which Gov. Paul Johnson of Mississippi was permitted, rhetorically speaking, to get away with murder.

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What gives these matters their most obvious connection is that much of the Counterattack essay is dedicated to the proposition that "the television networks usually slant their news and special coverage toward the left." Anyone who watched Gov. Johnson receive the once-over politely administered to him by the usually clawing interrogators of "Meet the Press" will find the accusation peculiarly wild and ill-timed.

It is a long time since Counterattack, once a major house organ of the blacklisting business, has warranted serious notice. Now largely the personal product of an ex-newspaperman named Ike McNally and an ex G-man named John G. Keenan, it has spent much of its recent labor lamenting that William Randolph Hearst Jr. lacks the militant anti-Bolshevik spirit of his father.

But the current issue is something special. Its tone and technique inescapably imitate the methods employed by Rev. Charles E. Coughlin in the heyday of his demagogic career.

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The immediate target of the Counterattack crusade is a volume written by two officers of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith. Called "Danger on the Right," it is a description of various levels of the Radical Right. It takes pains to identify the points of departure as well as palship between the fanatic fringe and more respectable conservatism.

What ostensibly provokes Counterattack's assault is the

favorable treatment accorded the book in many areas of the press. This is described as "a spectacular demonstration of power by a group identifying itself with the Jewish Community." Counterattack proceeds to analyze the problem with this form of ideological reverse English:

"We here at Counterattack have been asked if Jews really control the United States. They do not. On the contrary we believe that rank and file members of the Jewish community have no wish to do more than prosper in legitimate commerce. An inordinate number of them go broke trying to do just that. Some of them lack the patience that has given the Yankees dominion over the nation's industry. . ."

With this droll disclaimer, Counterattack thereupon depicts the television industry (and the press) as captives of Jewish ownership seeking to "condition the viewers to the kind of nation they think the viewers should have." And finally this memorable non-sequitur: "Because the Jewish community is reputed to be ninety per cent liberal, the world they are deemed to favor is a socialist state."

The result, among other things, is that "entertainment programs are deeply impregnated with Communist poison disguised as liberal viewpoints." Take that, "Peyton Place" and "Beverly Hillbillies."

The manifesto ends with an old-fashioned threat. Mr. McNally discloses that "a number of individuals" have warned "Jewish leaders" against any identification with such volumes as "Danger on the Right" because this is "a bad practice, justifying the resentment it stirs up."

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We return you now to the real world. Gov. Johnson of Mississippi is on the air. Larry Spivak, for long years an intrepid, irrepressible questioner, is genially inviting the Governor to describe "the image" of Mississippi that he wants to project. Claude Sitton, the gentleman from The Times, asks in a gentlemanly way whether the absence of Negroes from Democratic conventions in the state "demonstrates a lack of interest or a feeling that they could not be welcome there." Gov. Johnson blandly explains that "there has been nothing but good relationships between officials of the state of Mississippi and the members of the Negro race." Frank Van Der Linden of the Nashville Banner solicits the Governor's learned views on subversion in the civil rights movement. NBC's Richard Valeriani tries a pointed question, but he is buried in the atmosphere of harmony.

Were three young civil rights workers murdered in Mississippi last summer? Was there ever a Medgar Evers? The questions, like so many others, were never asked, but Medgar's brother was freely denounced. Few men ever survived a "Meet the Press" show as unscarred and untroubled as Paul Johnson.

Clearly something had gone wrong with the "left-wing" seizure of television power, just as Counterattack was reaching its credulous subscribers.